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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 001633

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: IRISH/CHINA ARMS EMBARGO: NOT RIPE TO LIFT YET

Classified By: Charge Jon Benton for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. On October 19, a delegation comprised of State DRL and PM and DoD J-5 visited members of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Parliament, and Amnesty International-Irish Section, to argue against the EU lifting its arms embargo against China. Until recently, Irish officials had said that the embargo would be lifted unless the UK blocked it. This time, they said that no EU decision is imminent, and they described the EU as slowly and carefully reviewing whether to lift the embargo. EU governments, the Irish said, are increasingly concerned about non-proliferation and security, while parliaments and the public largely oppose lifting the embargo on human rights grounds. Cliona Manahan, Director for Asia and the Pacific, said the Irish government is concerned that lifting the embargo would adversely affect security in the region and send the Chinese the wrong signal on human rights. She said the GoI makes those points in the EU. The Irish parliament and Amnesty International clearly supported maintaining the embargo. Comment: The Irish government was much more forthcoming this time, even going so far as to say that it would not be "ripe" to lift the embargo now. However, it studiously avoided saying that it opposes lifting the embargo. We suspect that while Ireland is willing to raise concerns within the EU, it would not as a small country be at the center of opposition, nor be willing to be the sole nay-sayer. End Summary and Comment.

DFA Sees Little Progress on Human Rights;
Shares Security Concerns

2. (C) Cliona Manahan, Director for Asia and the Pacific, said that China has made only limited improvements in its human rights situation. She said that 15 years after Tiananmen, there are persistent problems with torture, continued "re-education" through labor camps, and lack of progress on UN human rights mechanisms. In general, she said, the increasing openness of the economy and society has not extended to civic or political life. To lift the embargo now, Manahan said, would be seen by China as vindication of its token improvement in human rights and a sign of diminished EU interest in human rights. At the same time, she said, the Irish parliament and public remain deeply concerned about human rights in China, including the situation in Tibet and of the Falun Gong, and about ramifications for Taiwan.

3.(C) In response to the U.S. description of security concerns, the Irish said that they shared those concerns and raised them regularly within the EU. Interestingly, they offered that Ireland does not see lifting the embargo as necessary for gaining investment opportunities. Business, Manahan said, is booming anyway. She also said that adding human rights clauses to a renewed U.S.-EU technical cooperation agreement would give the U.S. and EU another tool with respect to third countries.

EU's Next Steps

4. (C) Manahan said that the EU is sensing "dialogue fatigue" among the Chinese. She suggested that it would be helpful to convene the Bern group so that all countries holding human rights dialogues could compare notes and coordinate future actions. Ireland, she said, is beginning to wonder whether China engages in dialogue for optics only, with no intention of making changes. Unfortunately, she said, the EU's review of China's human rights situation was done at the same time as Iran's, and China looked good in comparison. Similarly, some in the EU consider that lifting the embargo on Libya sets a precedent for China. She noted that China is playing a very aggressive diplomatic game in a wide range of contacts in EU member states and international organizations. She also said the EU is grappling with what it means, in the 21st century, to have a "strategic partnership" with a country such as China. A strategic partnership would seem to be one without arms embargos attached. While human rights arguments work well with the public, who in turn put pressure on governments, she said that among governments and elites, the political/military arguments against lifting the embargo are more effective.

Parliament

15. (SBU) Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Irish Parliament welcomed the opportunity to receive the U.S. delegation and to discuss the EU arms embargo against China. They said that Ireland is especially interested in this matter as it pertains to human rights, an important subject for the Irish public. The parliamentarians noted that some progress has been achieved in human rights, but not enough. Dr. Michael Woods, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, stated that China has made considerable progress in socio-economic terms, but concerns remain in terms of freedom of the press, assembly, and religion. Woods also expressed concern with Internet restrictions and violations of minority rights. According to Woods, China is sending a mixed picture at best; the progress is commendable, but not enough. Another member of parliament, Bernard Allen, raised regional security issues surrounding Taiwan and expressed concern that the lifting of the embargo might start a new Asian arms race.

Amnesty International

16. (SBU) In a meeting with Amnesty International's Irish Section, Director Sean Love voiced the same concerns about human rights as the DFA and parliament. At the same time, he voiced his frustration at the lack of interest at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in requiring corporate responsibility for human rights in trade agreements. In a separate follow-up conversation with emboff, a DETE official confirmed that there is no requirement for Irish businesses to raise human rights in their commercial dealings with China. He also noted that there are no Irish plans to sell weapons to the Chinese.

Players Involved

17. (U) Members of Parliament and Government officials: Dr. Michael Woods, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee (Fianna Fail), Dan Wallace, Former Lord Mayor of Cork (Fianna Fail), and Bernard Allen (Fine Gael). The delegation also met with senior members of the DFA, including Cliona Manahan, Director of Asia and Pacific, Mary O'Connor-EU External Relations, Sean O'Regan-Human Rights, and Paul Barnwell-Disarmament and Nonproliferation. A further meeting convened with Amnesty International's Irish Section.
BENTON